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The Condition of the Restoration Church of Scotland in the Highlands

No issue dominates the modern understanding of seventeenth-century Scotland quite like religion. From the Five Articles of Perth (1617) to the settlement of 1690 *via* the Covenanted movement, it often seems to form the central mass around which orbits all interest in the period. This focus on religious issues is of particular importance for the Restoration. Here, the conflict between an Erastian, Episcopalian Church of Scotland and a community of fervently Presbyterian Nonconformists dominates the conventional historiography, and despite renewed academic interest in social, political, and cultural issues in recent decades, this struggle continues to occupy a primary place in the scholarly corpus. The pre-eminence of organisational disputes has had the paradoxical effect of retarding our understanding of the way the Restoration Church actually functioned at a local level. This deficiency is particularly apparent in reference to the Highlands, where anaemic platitudes about the vagueness of Highland Christianity have tended to take the place of substantive analysis. This article will attempt partially to address that gap through assessing the position of the Episcopalian Church in the Highlands between the restoration of Charles II in 1660 and the fall of James VII in 1688. It will focus on two themes, the first being provision, in terms of finances, ministerial coverage, and physical infrastructure. Secondly, it will look at the extent and seriousness of religious dissent, considering both Presbyterianism and Roman Catholicism.

The performance of the Church of Scotland in the early-modern Highlands has not in the past attracted favourable comment. The conventional model, espoused for example by Isobel Grant and Hugh Cheape, and more recently restated by Michael Fry and Michael Newton, is that the Reformation caused a fundamental cleavage between the Highlands and a Protestant Kirk which, in both its Episcopalian and Presbyterian guises, consistently failed to offer either an adequate ecclesiastical structure, or sufficient provision in Gaelic.¹ A more optimistic vision has been offered by Margo Todd. Building upon James Kirk's earlier assessment of the Jacobean situation, she argues that the Reformed Kirk had by the end of the sixteenth century been fairly successful in disseminating its message and regulating society, a position it more or less maintained thereafter.² She does however concede that these developments established themselves markedly more slowly in the Highlands than in the Lowlands, and this general sense of more limited progress beyond the Highland line is fairly ubiquitous. Moreover, it echoes the conclusion reached by a number of contemporary commentators, who asserted that the Highlands were more or less irreligious. Robert Kirk, Episcopalian minister of Balquhiddy, opined that 'Want of Sound Knowledge is much of the cause' of Highland lawlessness, while the Irish priest John Cahassy, who spent four years during the early 1680s as a missionary to the Highlands, declared that 'though they be under the notion of protestants yet truly they have no Religion at all but are rather infidels then of any sect'.³ Given these contributions, the question of how far the Restoration Highlands really were estranged from the established Kirk demands to be addressed.

It is certainly the case that there were some worrying shortcomings in ecclesiastical provision, and it is not difficult to identify parishes in which endowments were below the expected level. In Dunoon presbytery, at least five sessions (Straguyir, Dunoon, Lochgoilhead, Kilmaglass and Strathlachlan) lacked a manse. In neighbouring Lorne, the figure was four (Kilninver, Ardchattan, Kilmoluag and Kilmore). Only about a year of presbytery records survive from Kintyre, but even this is enough to identify one parish – Suddie – in which the lack of proper accommodation threatened to drive away the incumbent minister.⁴ The problem was not of course confined to Argyllshire. Kiltarlity, Boleskine, Wardlaw and Daviot, all in the presbytery of Inverness, were similarly deficient, as were the Caithness sessions of Olrick and Thurso, while in the 1680s the presbytery of Dunkeld calculated that repairing the manses of Kirkmichael, Capath, Dull and Inchaden would together cost over £2,000 Scots.⁵ Clearly all of this suggests a more or less endemic problem of poor provision for ministers, but it should also be recognised that concerted attempts were often made to rectify deficiencies. In Suddie, the parishioners declared themselves willing to contribute towards the construction of a manse, and the brethren wrote to Archibald Campbell, marquis of Argyll seeking a similar commitment. Efforts were also made in Wardlaw, and the local heritors had gone so far as to employ masons by 1672. Yet such efforts cannot conceal the very widespread failure of the Highland Kirk to provide proper accommodation for its ministers.

Payment of teinds and ministers' stipends was equally unreliable, often on account of local unwillingness to contribute. When he died in 1665, William Fraser,

minister of Kiltarlity, was owed more than £888 Scots in unpaid stipends.⁶ Also in Inverness presbytery, Thomas Houston of Boleskine complained in 1670 that many of his parishioners owed him up to eight years of unpaid stipends, while James Smith of Dores noted the following year that he had 'ne[the]r countenance nor maintenance amongst his hard-hearted Parishoners' who seemed to assume that 'chameleon-like, he could live upon [th]e air'.⁷ In Thurso, William Abernethy, upon his death in 1662, was owed more than £400 Scots in unpaid stipends from one heritor, James Sinclair of Assery.⁸ In other cases, funds were diverted away from sessions. In the presbytery of Lorne, for instance, teinds were appropriated from at least six parishes. In Kilmore and Kilbride, the beneficiary was the bishop of Argyll, who also held a stake in Kilninver and Melfot (along with John Campbell of Ardchattan) and Ardchattan (with Ardchattan and the bishop of Dunblane). Kilmoluag also experienced significant appropriation of its teinds to three members of the Campbell family – John Campbell of Genorchy, John Campbell of Airds and Archibald Campbell, 9th earl of Argyll.⁹ Taken together, all of these points suggest that Highland ministers remained a rather downtrodden group. Often denied adequate housing and very likely to have their incomes withheld or diverted, many of them cannot have lived in great comfort. This must have had a detrimental impact upon their enthusiasm and devotion, and cannot have enhanced their social standing.

Analogous weaknesses were apparent in the Kirk's built resources. As early as 1662, the synod of Sutherland noted 'the ruinous condition of the most part of the fabricks of kirks within the diocis and the slacknes of the heretours to contribut to

their reparations'.¹⁰ The problem apparently persisted; the ministers of both Olrick and Dunnet complained about the poor states of their churches in 1670, with the latter noting that the 'rooffe wanted pinting [and] the windowes wanted glass'.¹¹ Farther south, the church building at Dingwall was declared to be 'ruinous' in 1680, while Chanonry's church was by 1688 in need of serious repair.¹² At Boleskine in the presbytery of Inverness, the minister, on being asked in 1675 why he did not celebrate communion with any frequency, answered that he could not because his church had fallen down!¹³ Argyllshire had similar problems. A series of visitations in Dunoon presbytery during the late 1670s discovered that most parishes had an adequate church, although generally lacking refinements like window glass or churchyard dykes. But there was a major exception at Kilmun, where the derelict building demanded repairs estimated to cost £500 Scots.¹⁴ A still worse situation confronted the neighbouring presbytery of Lorne, where at least six churches – at Kilbride, Kilmore, Kilninver, Melfort, Ardchattan and Bellevoalan – were either ruined or missing entirely.¹⁵ The physical infrastructure of the Highland Kirk seems therefore to have been generally poor, something which reflected inadequate finances and must have had a profound psychological impact. A church building was the symbolic and practical centrepiece of Christian life, and a parish which lacked this most fundamental of resources was at a profound disadvantage. That so many parishes were deficient reflected poorly on the Kirk's vitality and authority in the Highlands.

In addition, ministerial provision was far from comprehensive. A projected visitation of Kilninver parish in 1677 was delayed for nearly four months because

there were not enough ministers within the presbytery of Lorne to form a quorum.¹⁶ The brethren of the neighbouring presbytery, Dunoon, had already weathered a more serious crisis in 1673-4, when the paucity of ministers forced them to suspend presbytery meetings for several months, delegating their authority to Kirk sessions.¹⁷ The impact of such patchy provision was felt well beyond the borders of the areas directly affected. Such was the 'Paucity of the Brethren' in the presbytery of Sutherland that neighbouring Caithness arranged in 1668 that one of its ministers would '(by course) concurre w[i]t [the]m each Presbytery day: And a Note of [the]r Proceedings or actings [is] to be brought, by the Bro[the]r deputed, to the Bishop [and] Brethren of Caithnes'.¹⁸ Similarly, Inverness presbytery complained in 1670 that helping to supply the vacant Moray-shire sessions of Auldearn and Kinloss was placing 'a weighty burden on [th]em', for which the assistance of the synod of Moray was sought.¹⁹ Awareness of such gaps should of course be balanced by recognition that provision in some areas was fairly stable. Relatively few of the thirty-two or so parishes in the synod of Ross seem to have been without a minister for any length of time, for example.²⁰ Nevertheless, finding ministers for all parishes was clearly a major challenge, and one to which the Restoration Kirk was never quite equal. As a result, access to a minister was for many intermittent at best, resulting in further dilution of the Church's grip over its parishioners.

On top of this, those ministers who were in post could not always be relied upon. The presbytery of Inverness provided two of the most striking examples of insufficient ministerial diligence. The minister of Urquhart, Duncan McCulloch, was persuaded to resign his charge in 1671 following mounting complaints that he failed

to visit or pray with his parishioners, did not administer the sacraments, and tended to disgrace his office by wearing 'so beggerly a habit'.²¹ In the same year, Alexander Fraser, minister in the nearby parish of Daviot, suddenly deserted his charge, ostensibly because he had developed a dislike of Episcopalianism, declaring that his parishioners 'needed not expect anything more of him except a valedictorie sermon'.²² There seems to have been a more general slackness in Caithness, where consistent low turnout at presbyterial meetings caused the brethren in 1664 to introduce a fine of one shilling for all ministers who were not present by 10am on the requisite day.²³ It was also perfectly possible for clergymen to abuse their position, as was experienced by Marjorie Leith, wife of the Inverness burgess Patrick Gordon. In October 1677 she was cleared by the synod of Moray of an unspecified 'scandall'. This, however, was a verdict with which the local minister, Alexander Clerk, did not agree, and when Leith attended church on 14 October, she was subjected to a furious denunciation from the pulpit, which also implied that the synod had been negligent in its prosecution of her. After investigation by both the presbytery and synod, Clerk was rebuked for his vigilantism.²⁴ Such high-handedness was not unique to Clerk; in 1675, no lesser an individual than John Paterson, bishop of Ross, was accused by David Ross of Fortrose of abusing his parents by 'forceing from [the]m [and] over ther bellies [i.e. in spite of them] Ther hors[e]s To work his s[e]rvice', and beating them when they attempted to resist.²⁵

Of more widespread concern seems to have been the performance of irregular marriages. The minister of Glenorchy, John Lindsay, was rebuked for consecrating a bigamous marraige between Dougal Maclellan and Marie NicAlasdair in 1667; Colin

Campbell of Ardchattan was temporarily suspended in 1675-6 for being party to an irregular marriage; and Hugh Fraser of Kiltarlity was in 1676 accused of marrying delinquents 'without any testificat'.²⁶ Hugh Fraser had earlier been involved in a rather different manifestation of ministerial laxness towards the rite of marriage. In 1674 he had undergone 'a mock mariage' to Bessie Gray, celebrated by the minister of Daviot, Michael Fraser, and witnessed by Alexander Clerk of Inverness. Although all parties declared that the marriage had been 'by way of drollry [and] Jest [and] [tha]t nothing [the]rin was seriously concluded', the two Frasers were both rebuked, and were informed that they had not 'behaued [the]mselvs as becomeing graue [and] sober ministers [...] q[ui]ch had opend the mouths of manie to the scandell of the holie ministrie'.²⁷ The lack of godly rigour betrayed by these cases no doubt contributed to the widespread poor reputation which the Highland ministry seems to have garnered. The English Nonconformist theologian Richard Baxter, compiling a roster of those peoples who through lack of 'plain, convincing, serious, lively and exemplary Preachers' suffered chronic 'ignorance, sensuality, worldliness [and] profaneness', included Highlanders on the list, amongst the Welsh, Greeks, Muscovites and Armenians.²⁸ Yet such deficiencies must not be overstated. The presbytery of Caithness regularly congratulated itself on the strong performance of its ministers, notwithstanding their indifference to presbyterial meetings – only in Bower, where it was observed in 1668 that communion was not celebrated regularly enough, was there any hint of criticism.²⁹ The presbytery of Inverness was likewise satisfied with the performance of nearly all its ministers during its diet of visitations in 1672-3 and 1677.³⁰ If then a number of Highland ministers were either chronically

sub-standard or prone to serious lapses in the performance of their duty, care should be taken before extrapolating from this any thesis of general inadequacy.

At the same time, it should be recognised that these issues were not peculiar to the Highlands. Famously, clerical provision in Scotland was compromised by the Act for Presentation and Collation (1662), which deprived around one-third of Scotland's ministers (particularly in the south-west), a huge pool of vacant charges for which neither the Kirk nor the government were ever quite able to compensate.³¹ Low stipends and unpaid teinds were likewise a perennial challenge across the country, and by the same token, occasional ministerial slackness, and even corruption, had been an ongoing feature of the Kirk since (and, indeed, before) the Reformation.³² It may be that these deficiencies were more pronounced in the Highlands than elsewhere, although a great deal more research into the state of the ecclesiastical infrastructure of Lowland Scotland is needed before firm conclusions can be drawn. None the less, it is clear that the shortcomings in provision which undoubtedly marked the Restoration Kirk in the Highlands were not unique to that region.

One issue which did however separate the Highlands from the Lowlands was Gaelic. A number of historians, taking their cue either from the Anglicising tone of the Statutes of Iona (1609), or the overtly anti-Gaelic stance of eighteenth-century Presbyterianism, have argued that the early-modern Kirk was inherently hostile to Gaelic culture, and consciously sought to promote Anglicisation.³³ However, provision in Gaelic was a major preoccupation. Parliament set the tone early on, ordering in 1663 that all vacant stipends in Argyll and the Isles be used to support

eight expectants and eight scholars, all of whom were to be Gaelic speakers destined to 'serve in the ministrie [...] wherby the Ghospell may be the more propogat and pietie abound amongst them'.³⁴ Later, in 1674, the Privy Council authorised a scheme proposed by Robert Kirk for translating the last 100 psalms into Gaelic, and appointed a committee composed of the Gaelic-speaking ministers of Raasay, Dunoon, Tiree, Kilmore, Kilfinan, Glenaray, Kilchrenan and Kilmodan to work on the project.³⁵ The Gaelic psalms eventually appeared in 1684.³⁶ There are obvious parallels to be drawn here between the Highland and Irish experiences. Like its Scottish counterpart, Irish Gaelic was increasingly a language in retreat, pushed ever westwards and lacking any significant print culture. None the less, there is little to suggest that the Irish clergy were actively hostile to the language, and indeed, any reinforcement it did receive, such as Francis Molloy's *Lucerna Fidelium* (1667), tended to be inspired by a desire to offer religious instruction in Irish.³⁷

On the ground, too, widespread efforts were made to provide preaching in Gaelic. The minister of Dores, James Smith, spoke in English and Gaelic every Sunday, by which his parishioners were 'refreshed very much'.³⁸ In the united parishes of Dunoon and Kilmond, where '[th]e greatest p[ar]t [...] consists of [th]e Irish language', Duncan Campbell was in 1661 ordained to assist the minister, James Fraser, 'who wants [th]e Irish', by preaching 'tuo saboths at Kilmond [and] each third saboth at dunoone in irish'.³⁹ In 1683, the brethren of Dunkeld refused to admit Alexander McLagan as minister of Little Dunkeld because 'he could neither preach nor pray in Irish'. Even a letter from the bishop, Andrew Bruce, pointing out that 'a certain gentleman had undertaken in Mr McLagans behalf that within a year

he wold be able to catechise [and] baptise [and] marry in Irish' failed fully to allay their reservations.⁴⁰ Indeed, so serious was this issue taken that when, in 1669, the parishioners of Creich complained that their minister, Charles Alexander, was insufficiently fluent in Gaelic, Patrick Forbes, bishop of Caithness, dispatched the brethren of the neighbouring presbytery of Caithness to conduct an inspection.⁴¹ All of this may indeed suggest a degree of weakness in Gaelic provision, and certainly by 1690 it had, even in England, come to be seen as scandalous that 'The Inhabitants of the Highlands of Scotland, have never had the Bible in their own Language'.⁴² But it hardly supports the thesis of wilful neglect, and there is certainly no evidence that, at this point, the Church's aim was 'the spiritual use of Gaelic as an initial stage in the secular advancement of English'.⁴³

Provision, then, was an ongoing challenge for the Restoration Kirk. The topography of the Highlands was of course a perpetual issue, and it was amplified by a number of other geographical factors, such as the relatively large size of Highland parishes (many of them long-since conjoined to create even larger charges) and the scattered distribution of population. Perhaps, therefore, it was inevitable that financial and physical resources should have been incomplete, just as, in conjunction with linguistic barriers, these same problems made it difficult to field a full complement of trustworthy ministers. Even if the extent to which all of this was worse in the Highlands than in the Lowlands is unclear, it is obvious that the immediate impact was negative – penurious, sometimes unreliable ministers, ruinous buildings and intermittent access to preaching cannot but have retarded the prestige and authority of the Church.

Yet while recognising these deficiencies, it is important not to exaggerate them. The Kirk in the Highlands may have had its weaknesses, but they were the sort of weaknesses that reflected its status as the dominant ecclesiastical structure. This dominance, in turn, was based upon a close relationship with society at large. John MacInnes suggests that clan society chimed well with the hierarchical structure of the Episcopalian Church.⁴⁴ Such claims of emotional affinity are difficult to verify – although some vernacular poetry, particularly the Episcopalian verse contained in the Fernaig manuscript, seems to reflect genuine Gaelic attachment to the established Kirk – but it is certainly true that Highland luminaries often engaged closely with ecclesiastical authority.⁴⁵ In July 1681, Neil Campbell, brother of Argyll, proposed that three new parishes should be erected in western Lorne, centred on Colonsay, Seil and Melford. This scheme, received favourably by the presbytery of Lorne, encapsulated the mutually beneficial interaction between secular elites and the Kirk. The Campbells, who as the major proprietors in the area would control the new sessions, stood to gain a sophisticated infrastructure with which to pacify newly-acquired lands in the south-western Highlands, while the Church could exploit the protection of the House of Argyll to expand its presence in the west.⁴⁶ Bolstered by this kind of symbiosis, the Episcopalian Kirk was not an organisation struggling to assert itself, but one with an entrenched position which it worked to maintain.

Nevertheless, weaknesses in provision raise questions about the degree of conformity. This has attracted a good deal of attention, since historians increasingly emphasise that confessional uniformity could form a central component of national

identity and political culture. Conversely, Nonconformity was generally viewed as a sign of more general disengagement with ecclesiastical and political norms.⁴⁷ While these trends tend to be more readily associated with the Catholic absolutisms, such as France and the Habsburg empire, they have equally been applied to Protestant states, such as Karl XI's Lutheran Sweden.⁴⁸ There were, of course, exceptions (the Dutch Republic being the most frequently-cited one, although even here confessional toleration was arguable offset by some marked legal and political advantages enjoyed by Calvinists), but in general historians have tended to acknowledge the importance of religious conformity in advertising a person's or a community's political engagement and acceptability.⁴⁹

In a British context, the notion of a link between Nonconformity and sedition was reinforced by the nature of the Restoration settlements. Across the three kingdoms, Charles II's governments imposed restrictive Church settlements which attempted to impose monolithic, Episcopalian structures.⁵⁰ Despite this, Nonconformity, especially Presbyterianism and, in Ireland, Catholicism, flourished across the British Isles. Within this narrative, the Highlands occupy a slightly anomalous position: while historians usually claim that the established Church was weak, there is no attendant belief in the vitality of Nonconformity. Indeed, Allan Macinnes's statement that 'religious dissent was not an issue of substance in the Highlands' is entirely representative of an historiographical consensus which posits that Presbyterianism was simply an irrelevance in Restoration Gaeldom.⁵¹

The readiest measure of dissenting opinion lies in the attitude of the local clergy; it was, after all, through the efforts of ejected and, later, Indulged ministers

that Presbyterianism was able to survive in its south-eastern heartlands.⁵² The extent of Nonconformity amongst Highland ministers is difficult to estimate with any precision. Robert Wodrow estimated that about forty-one of the Highlands' roughly 149 sessions – some 30% – were served at some point by a dissenting minister. Of course, this conceals important regional variations. Argyll experienced particularly high levels of Nonconformity, averaging about one-third across the province, while Ross (25%) and the presbytery of Dunkeld (50%) were also badly affected. On the other hand, the brethren in the synod of Sutherland, just one of whom dissented, were markedly less inclined to object to the Episcopalian settlement, as were the ministers in Inverness presbytery, amongst whom there was also just one Nonconformist.⁵³

Care should be taken not to place too much faith in Wodrow's figures, partly because he was an obviously partisan figure, partly because he offered no clear definition of how he defined Nonconformity, and partly because the surviving documentation is not full enough to allow for thorough verification. Nevertheless, it is certainly the case that there was some notable ministerial resistance to the Episcopalian settlement. In March 1661, the Scottish Parliament ordered the presbytery of Caithness to delay the admission of the new minister of Dunnet, John Smart, because he was suspected of Presbyterian sympathies. This turned out to be only a temporary measure, and Smart was admitted later that year, but other ministers suffered longer-term punishments.⁵⁴ Thomas Hogg, the minister of Kiltearn, was deprived of his charge in 1662.⁵⁵ That year saw John Mackillican of Fodderty suffer the same fate. He proceeded to become one of the most infamous

conventicling ministers in the Highlands, suffering at least one spell of imprisonment, before returning to the Church as minister of Alness following the 1687 Toleration Edict.⁵⁶ Also in 1662, James Garner of Kintyre was exiled and John Cameron of Kilfinan was confined to Lochaber.⁵⁷ William Geddes of Wick seems also to have had reservations about Episcopalianism, although in November 1662 he was persuaded to declare himself 'in ordor to the p[rese]nt episcopall government' and promised to 'concure w[i]t it in his practice'.⁵⁸

Such flashes of resistance did not end in the 1660s. The Presbyterian sympathies of the Daviot minister Alexander Fraser, who abandoned his charge in 1672, have already been noted. Angus Macbean of Inverness took flight for similar reasons in mid-1687. He began holding house-conventicles within the burgh, before being imprisoned by the Privy Council in the winter of 1687-8 – apparently the Toleration Edict was not enough to reconcile him to Episcopalianism.⁵⁹ The most striking developments were however in the presbytery of Kintyre, where those ministers ousted in 1662-3 maintained a rival Presbyterian hierarchy which survived long enough to re-emerge triumphant after 1687.⁶⁰ While these scattered examples do not confirm the veracity of Wodrow's figures, and certainly do not compare with the experiences of the covenanting heartlands in south-western Scotland, they do serve as a reminder that there was a tenacious, if small community of dissenting ministers in the Highlands.

Amongst the lay elite of the Highlands, the dominant response to the Episcopalian settlement seems to have been quiet acceptance; even Wodrow admitted that outward conformity was nearly unanimous.⁶¹ Most of those families

who had shown some sympathy for Presbyterianism before 1660 seem to have kept a low profile, and indeed it is probably no coincidence that the strongly Covenanting John Gordon, 13th earl of Sutherland retired from public life early in 1662. Others were more willing to offer active endorsement. Alexander Stewart, 5th earl of Moray greeted the return of episcopacy by handing over his house of Spynie to the now bishop of Moray; it was reputed that Hugh Fraser, 8th lord Lovat could 'argue most accurately [...] against dissenters'; Jonathan Urquhart of Cromarty actively pursued Nonconformist preachers; Kenneth Mackenzie, 3rd earl of Seaforth publically declared his determination to enforce the new order; George Sinclair, 6th earl of Caithness was active in ensuring there was no dissent within his sphere; and Glenorchy's opposition to Presbyterianism was such that, in 1676, he condemned the policy of Indulgence and promised to be 'as active as any' in the suppression of conventicles.⁶²

Nevertheless, there were clearly pockets of resistance. A particular question-mark hung over Argyllshire, especially those parts of the county – such as Cowal, Kintyre and Inveraray – which, as a consequence of Campbell-sponsored plantation at the start of the seventeenth century, had substantial populations of Lowland ancestry. Argyll himself was consistently suspected of sharing his father's Presbyterian sympathies – and, indeed, it was in the guise of a Presbyterian champion that he would eventually launch his ill-fated rebellion in 1685 – but he proved willing to keep his convictions to himself in return for the extensive powers delegated to him by the government.⁶³ Others within his sphere of influence were not so circumspect. The heritors of Campbeltown (Kintyre presbytery) betrayed a

solidly dissenting stance in 1672 when they told Argyll they were only willing to contribute towards the upkeep of a minister 'of a presbeiterian judgment, in whom we may have satisfaction'. Five years later, they were even prepared to endure a stent of £3 per merkland in order to pay for a Presbyterian church building, having grown weary of meeting 'in the milln', which was 'exceidinly wncomodious' and too small for the multitudes, both English- and Gaelic-speaking, who frequented it.⁶⁴ A comparable well of Presbyterian sympathy can also be seen in the presbytery of Dunoon. There, the Laird of Ardkinglass became notorious as a patron of conventicles, and was known to have invited several 'vagrent minister[s]' to preach within his home parish of Strathmore. By 1680 these meetings were drawing substantial numbers away from the parish church, and the presbytery felt compelled to issue a riposte – although the tenor of this response, which focused not on the Nonconformity of Ardkinglass's conventicles, but on the fact that they undermined order, seemed to imply a degree of institutional sympathy with the Presbyterian position.⁶⁵ In any case, the receptiveness of Argyllshire to Nonconformity was further attested in 1685, when a specially constituted Lieutenancy Court was compelled to fine several dozen individuals for attending 'seditious sermons' delivered by preachers attached to Argyll's rebellious forces.⁶⁶

In the north, Presbyterianism was strongest in the east-coast burghs and their immediate hinterlands, particularly in north-eastern Inverness-shire and on The Black Isle. George Mackenzie of Tarbat had predicted in the early 1660s that 'some northern bishops' would find 'contempt and injuries [...] cast upon them'.⁶⁷ Certainly, there was notable dissent. A group of men were fined in Inverness in

1671 'for not hearing the present ministers'.⁶⁸ A Justiciary Commission on Disaffection, established by the Privy Council in 1685, prosecuted at least three east-Highland individuals for confirmed or suspected attendance at conventicles, two of whom – William Mackintosh of Borlum and Lady Grant – were members of clan gentries.⁶⁹ A number of 'unlicensed preachers' presided over conventicles in this area, notwithstanding Seaforth's disingenuous insistence in 1682 that there were 'no such disorderly people'.⁷⁰ Some prayer meetings were conducted by locals like John Mackillican or, perhaps more infamously, James Fraser of Brea. Son of the 7th Lord Lovat's staunchly Covenanting brother, Brea had embraced Presbyterianism during the 1650s, and began life as an itinerant preacher around 1672. Dividing his efforts between southern Scotland and his home territory around the Moray Firth, he made himself sufficiently irksome to the government to suffer intercommuning in the mid-1670s, two bouts of imprisonment in 1677-9 and 1682, and ultimately banishment in 1682.⁷¹ The north was also served by a number of exiled southern Presbyterians, such as John Hepburn and Walter Denoon, both of whom were targeted for arrest by the Privy Council in 1680.⁷² Such men were able to operate because some influential individuals and families sympathised with their views. The wife of the prominent Inverness burgess George Cuthbert of Castlehill, for example, was suspected of harbouring dissenting preachers in the early 1680s.⁷³ Farther north, the Munros, especially Sir John Munro of Foulis, head of the family between 1668 and 1697, were famously keen Presbyterian patrons.⁷⁴ Foulis was discovered in 1678 to have been harbouring the ousted minister of Kinloss, James Gordon, who had also baptised his children. Under the protection of Foulis, Gordon began to gain adherents amongst

the wider Munro household and kindred, particularly in the parish of Kiltarn. By 1683, the Munro chief's Nonconformity was so notorious that the Privy Council placed him under house arrest.⁷⁵ The pattern of Protestant Nonconformity in the Highlands was then a limited one. It relied upon a confluence of active dissenting ministers and sympathetic local elites. This, of course, was broadly similar to the pattern sustaining Nonconformity elsewhere in Scotland.⁷⁶ In the Highlands, it meant that the established Church faced an isolated challenge around The Black Isle, and more serious, though still intermittent opposition in parts of Argyllshire. Although it is true that active Nonconformity was on a much more limited scale in the Highlands than in central and southern Scotland – as Brea noted, there was for a Presbyterian preacher 'not such a door opened in the North' – it is nevertheless important to note that the region did have first-hand experience of the phenomenon.⁷⁷

If historians have not lavished much attention on Protestant dissent in the Restoration Highlands, much more interest has been shown in the issue of Catholic adherence. In general terms, Duncan Canon MacLean argues that the people of the Highlands were more culturally attuned to the Catholic faith than to Protestantism, with the result that the region was naturally predisposed to accept Catholic instruction whenever it was offered. He also applied this interpretation to the Restoration period more specifically, and claimed that developments such as the formal reorganisation of the Scots Catholic clergy, the beginnings of Vincentian missionary work in Gaeldom and the first foundations of Catholic schools on the estates of Angus Macdonald of Glengarry – ennobled by Charles II as Lord

Macdonnell and Aros – point towards an important upswing in the fortunes of Highland Catholicism after 1660.⁷⁸ MacLean was himself a Catholic priest, and his work displays very clear bias in favour of his own church, but he is not alone in his interpretation. Alasdair Roberts likewise asserts that, given the right conditions, the Highlands could prove extremely fertile ground for Catholic missionaries, as he claims it did under the patronage of the Macdonalds on Skye, and the Mackenzies on Lewis.⁷⁹ Fiona Macdonald provides a more measured evaluation of the Catholic missionary effort. She argues that all the campaigns, mounted from Ireland by the Vincentians, Dominicans and Franciscans, were simply too small-scale to do much more than consolidate existing Catholic enclaves, and certainly lacked the resources to challenge the Kirk in areas where it had taken firm root. She also explicitly questions MacLean's thesis of some deep-seated sympathy between Gaelic culture and Catholicism.⁸⁰

None the less, contemporary missionaries viewed the Highlands as a potentially rich pasture. According to the secular priest Alexander Dunbar, the size of the Catholic community in the Highlands made it 'the most numerous Mis[sio]ne in the Kingdome'.⁸¹ John Cahassy estimated that there were 7,000 Catholics on the mainland alone and concluded that Highlanders, when given the chance, tended to embrace Catholicism with great enthusiasm:

Of al men in the uorld ther is no people that hath a desyre to be instructed in their Religion more then they. No people [is] comonly more submissiue and obedient to church they neuer speak to a pries[t] but after reseauing his benediction kneeling befor him [...] Many other of the adjacent cowntries uold embrace the Catholike Religion if churchmen did frequent them.⁸²

Despite such optimism, the mission was woefully under-manned. There was only one active priest in the Highlands in 1664, and this was still the situation at the end of the 1670s. Even a decade later, during its most dynamic phase, the mission fielded only seven men.⁸³ Historians are as a result fairly unanimous that Catholicism remained marginalised. Maclean, Roberts and Macdonald all agree that it survived only in isolated pockets scattered across the Highlands. Macinnes concurs, adding also that these communities remained extremely fragile throughout the Restoration.⁸⁴

Indeed, Catholicism on the mainland appears to have been concentrated largely in the most isolated districts. On the west coast, Moidart, Arisaig, Morar, Knoydart and Glengarry were all well-established enclaves. Further east, Catholic communities were known to subsist in the mountainous territory around Strathavon and Braemar, while material remains, in the form of mass stones at Maol Doine and Glenroy, suggest a degree of adherence in Brae Lochaber as well.⁸⁵ There is evidence of a further presence in the presbytery of Inverness. In 1670, the bishop of Moray, 'regrating the increase of popery', demanded lists of all Catholics within the diocese; in response, the brethren of Inverness noted that 'Thomas Huistone [of Abertarff] is plagued w[i]t Papists'. A special sub-synod, sitting in June 1674, excommunicated nineteen Catholics in Inverness presbytery, concentrated in the parishes of Kiltarlity, Abertarff and Inverness, and there were still numerous Catholic families in the Strathglass area by 1679.⁸⁶ Clearly, these Catholic communities could offer a stubborn challenge to the established Church, but it nevertheless remains the case that they were few in number and widely scattered.

The Catholic position in the Western Isles was not much brighter, with adherence again restricted to less accessible locales. Cahassy noted that there were 'six Iles whose inhabitants are also Catholics', namely Eigg, Muck, Rum, Canna, South Uist and Barra. On top of this, 'five other little Isles were far in the sea southward to the Isle of Barra' – Vatersay, Mingulay, Pabbay, Sandray and Berneray - also adhered to the Roman Church.⁸⁷ In his description of the Hebrides, written in the mid-1690s, Martin Martin presented a broadly similar account. He suggested that Catholics constituted a majority on the islands of Benbecula, South Uist, Barra, Canna and Eigg, while minority Catholic communities existed on Lewis, Mull and Skye (principally Trotternish). Against this, however, he noted that Jura, Gigha, Islay, Colonsay, Tiree, Coll, Rum (in contradiction to Cahassy) and even remote St Kilda were all solidly Protestant.⁸⁸

As with Protestant Nonconformity, the key prerequisite for Catholic survival seems to have been local elite patronage. The scattered Catholic enclaves in Inverness-shire were recognised to rely upon the support of influential locals, such as the Chisholm family in Strathglass, or Sir John Byres of Coats and David Baillie of Dochfour in the environs of Inverness.⁸⁹ On Skye, the Macdonalds of Sleat were singled out as protectors of the Catholic community at Trotternish, while the lingering Catholicism of Barra and South Uist was sustained by the Macneills and Macdonalds of Clanranald respectively.⁹⁰ The Glengarry Macdonalds, another Catholic family, likewise supported their co-religionists in Glengarry and the western seaboard. More than that, Macdonnell, chief of the family between 1645 and 1680, was an active supporter of missionary endeavour described by the secular

priest Robert Munro as 'my most dear patron and master'.⁹¹ On Lewis, too, an ultimately unsuccessful mission launched in 1687 was possible only with the backing of the 4th earl of Seaforth, himself a Catholic convert.⁹² Despite such patronage, the Catholic challenge (like Protestant Nonconformity) was not powerful enough to undermine the basis of the established Kirk, nor was it ubiquitous enough to reflect some deep-seated cultural schism between the Church and Gaeldom. But it was sufficient to tie the Highlands, in its own way, into the wider problem of religious pluralism in Restoration Britain.

Both historians and contemporary observers have tended to paint a bleak picture of the early-modern Kirk's performance in the Highlands. According to this line of reasoning, the post-Reformation Church, handicapped by a weak resource-base and lacking sympathy with Gaelic culture, was never able to secure for itself the degree of influence it enjoyed in the Lowlands. Certainly, there was during the Restoration plenty of evidence that the Kirk boasted neither a well-developed infrastructure nor a full complement of reliable ministers. Yet it is by no means clear that these problems were markedly worse than those faced in the Lowlands at this time. Equally, while the difficulties surrounding provision in Gaelic should be acknowledged, they should not be exaggerated. At the same time, Nonconformity, in either its Presbyterian or Roman Catholic guises, failed to offer a viable challenge to the established Kirk, and survived only in isolated pockets – although clearly, the historiographical tendency to conclude that dissent was simply a non-issue in the Highlands is an exaggeration. Nevertheless, it is clear that, far from being without religion, Highlanders under Charles II and James VII lived in the shadow of an

established Church which, whatever challenges it faced, remained easily the dominant religious influence on their lives.

Notes

BL = British Library, London; EUL = Edinburgh University Library, Edinburgh; NLS = National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh; NRAS = National Register of Archives for Scotland; NRS = National Records of Scotland, Edinburgh; SCA = Scottish Catholic Archives, Edinburgh; *RPCS* = *Register of the Privy Council of Scotland, Third Series, 1661-1691*, ed. P.H. Brown *et al*, Edinburgh 1908-70; *RPS* = *Records of the Parliaments of Scotland to 1707*, ed. K.M. Brown *et al*, St Andrews 2007, www.rps.ac.uk.

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¹ I.F. Grant and H. Cheape, *Periods in Highland history*, London 1997, 168-70; M. Fry, *Wild Scots: four hundred years of Highland history*, London 2005, 40-1; M. Newton, *Warriors of the word: the world of the Scottish Highlanders*, Edinburgh 2009, 215-16.

² M. Todd, *The culture of Protestantism in early modern Scotland*, London 2002, 409-10; J. Kirk, 'The Jacobean Kirk in the Highlands, 1567-1625' in L. Maclean (ed.), *The seventeenth century in the Highlands*, Inverness 1984, 24-51.

³ NLS, MS.3932, fo. 153r-v; John Cahassy to Everard, 3 Dec. 1683, Blair Letter, SCA, BL/1/90/2.

⁴ NRS, CH2/111/1, fos 60-1, fos 87-8, fos 92-7; NRS, CH2/984/1, fos 298-303, fos 305-10, fos 319-23, fos 349-50; NRS, CH2/1153/1, fo. 31.

⁵ *Records of the presbyteries of Inverness and Dingwall*, ed. W. Mackay (Scottish History Society, 1896), 12, 24, 29, 73-4; NRS, CH2/47/1, fos 42-4; NRS, CH2/106/1, fos 6-8, fo. 10, fos 34-5, fos 47-50.

⁶ NRS, CC11/1/2, fos 8-9.

⁷ *Inverness and Dingwall*, 4-5, 8-9.

⁸ NRS, CC4/3/1, fos 87-8.

⁹ NRS, CH2/984/1, fos 290-4, fos 298-303, fos 305-10, fos 319-23.

¹⁰ NAS, CH2/345/1, fos 308-9.

¹¹ NRS, CH2/47/1, fo. 135, fo. 141.

¹² *Inverness and Dingwall*, 342-3; NRS, B28/7/3, fos 123v-124r.

¹³ *Inverness and Dingwall*, 55.

¹⁴ NRS, CH2/111/1, fos 87-97.

¹⁵ NRS, CH2/984/1, fos 292-3, fo. 299, fos 306-7, fos 320-1.

¹⁶ NRS, CH2/984/1, fos 294-8.

¹⁷ NRS, CH2/111/1, fo. 85.

¹⁸ NRS, CH2/47/1, fo. 121.

¹⁹ NRS, CH2/271/3, fo. 25.

²⁰ H. Scott, *Fasti ecclesiae Scoticae: The succession of ministers in the Church of Scotland from the reformation*, Edinburgh 1915-28, vii.

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- ²¹ *Inverness and Dingwall*, 12, 16.
- ²² Ibid. 20; NRS, CH2/271/3, fo. 64, fo. 66.
- ²³ NRS, CH2/47/1, fos 89-90.
- ²⁴ *Inverness and Dingwall*, 84-7; NRS, CH2/271/3, fos 132-5.
- ²⁵ NRS, B28/7/3, fo. 21r-v.
- ²⁶ NRS, CH2/984/1, fos 171-2, fos 275-8; *Inverness and Dingwall*, 65.
- ²⁷ NRS, CH2/271/3, fo. 86.
- ²⁸ Richard Baxter, *Catholick communion defended against both extreams* (Wing B.1206A), London 1684, 87.
- ²⁹ NRS, CH2/47/1, fo. 47, fos 58-9, fo. 65, fo. 122, fo. 141, fo. 148, fo. 191.
- ³⁰ *Inverness and Dingwall*, 17-30, 75-83.
- ³¹ I.B. Cowan, *The Scottish covenanters 1660-88*, London 1976, 50-5.
- ³² Todd, *Culture of Protestantism*, 57-8, 366-7, 366-7, 379; W.R. Foster, *Bishop and presbytery: the Church of Scotland 1661-1688*, London 1958, 106-7.
- ³³ C.W.J. Withers, *Gaelic Scotland: the transformation of a culture region*, London 1988.
- ³⁴ RPS, 1663/6/58, 1663/6/59.
- ³⁵ RPCS, iv, 116-7, 280.
- ³⁶ A.J. Mann, *The Scottish book trade 1500-1720: print commerce and print control in early modern Scotland*, East Linton 2000, 105, 108.
- ³⁷ S.J. Connolly, *Divided kingdom: Ireland 1630-1800*, Oxford 2008, 331; P. Lenihan, *Consolidating conquest: Ireland 1603-1727*, Harlow 2008, 245-6.
- ³⁸ *Inverness and Dingwall*, 9.
- ³⁹ NRS, CH2/111/1, fo. 68r.

⁴⁰ NRS, CH2/106/1, fos 21-3.

⁴¹ NRS, CH2/47/1, fos 130-1.

⁴² Anonymous, *An account of the design of printing about 3000 bibles in Irish, with the psalms of David in metre, for the use of the Highlanders* (Wing A.274A), 1690.

⁴³ Withers, *Gaelic Scotland*, 115.

⁴⁴ J. MacInnes, 'Clan unity and individual freedom', *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness*, xlvii, 1972, 338-373, at p.352.

⁴⁵ The Fernaig Manuscript is transcribed in *Reliquiae Celticae: texts, paper, and studies in Gaelic literature and philology*, ed. A Macbain and J. Kennedy, Inverness 1892-4, ii, 1-137. For an English translation of one poem, see D. MacRae, 'Rìgh na cruinne ta gun chrìch' [King of the world without end] in *Gàir nan clàrsach: an anthology of 17th century Gaelic poetry* ed. C. Ó Baoill, Edinburgh 1994, 182-3. It could be argued that such piety reflected not principled Episcopalianism, but simply the kind of non-denominational 'Celtic Christianity' recorded in the first two volumes of Alexander Carmichael's influential anthology of folk hymns, *Carmina Gadelica* (1900-71). D.E. Meek, 'Alexander Carmichael and 'Celtic Christianity'', in Domhnall Uilleam Stiùbhart (ed.), *The Life and Legacy of Alexander Carmichael*, Port of Ness 2008, 82-95, at pp.82-3.

⁴⁶ NRS, CH2/984/1, fos 353-4.

⁴⁷ J. Black, *Kings, Nobles and commoners: states and societies in early modern Europe*, London 2004, 41.

⁴⁸ G. Bossenga, 'Society' in W. Doyle (ed.), *Old regime France*, Oxford 2001, 42-77, at p.56; J. Berenger, 'The Austrian lands: Habsburg absolutism under Leopold I' in J.

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⁴⁹ J.L. Price, *The Dutch republic in the seventeenth century*, Basingstoke and London 1998, 87-106.

⁵⁰ J. Spurr, *The restoration Church of England, 1646-1689*, London 1991, 42; J. Smyth, 'The communities of Ireland and the British state, 1660-1707' in B. Bradshaw and J. Morril (eds), *The British problem, c.1534-1707: state formation in the Atlantic archipelago* Basingstoke 1996, 246-261, at p.249.

⁵¹ A.I. Macinnes, *Clanship, commerce and the house of Stuart, 1603-1788*, East Linton 1996, 124.

⁵² E.H. Hyman, 'A Church militant: Scotland, 1661-1690', *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 26:1 (1995), 49-74, *passim*.

⁵³ Robert Wodrow, *The history of the sufferings of the Church of Scotland from the restoration to the revolution*, Glasgow 1828-40, i, 324-8. The exact number of Kirk sessions in the Highlands is uncertain, and 149 is an estimate derived from Scott, *Fasti ecclesiae Scoticae*.

⁵⁴ RPS, M1661/1/23.

⁵⁵ Wodrow, *history of the sufferings*, i, 129.

⁵⁶ *Inverness and Dingwall*, 344-5; RPCS, viii, 29-30.

⁵⁷ RPCS, i, 303, 311.

⁵⁸ NRS, CH2/47/1, fos 61-2.

⁵⁹ *Inverness and Dingwall, 125-32; Letters of two centuries, chiefly concerned with Inverness and the Highlands, from 1616 to 1815*, ed. C Fraser-Mackintosh, Inverness 1890, 118; John Lauder, *Historical notices of Scottish affairs*, ed. D. Laing, Edinburgh 1848, ii, 834.

⁶⁰ NRS, CH2/1153/1, fo. 34r.

⁶¹ Wodrow, *history of the sufferings*, ii, 3.

⁶² Moray to Lauderdale, 1662, Lauderdale Papers, BL, Add. Mss. 23117, fo. 14; James Fraser, *Chronicles of the Frasers: the Wardlaw manuscript entitled 'polichronicon seu policratica temporum, or, the true genealogy of the Frasers'*, 916-1674, ed. W. Mackay, Edinburgh 1905, 458; Glenorchy to lady Lauderdale, 7 Sep. 1676, Lauderdale Papers, BL, Add. Mss. 23138, fo. 21; *The earls of Cromartie: their kindred, country and correspondence*, ed. W. Fraser, Edinburgh 1874, i, 12; NRS, CH2/47/1, fos 167-8.

⁶³ Anonymous, *Some reasons why Archibald Campbell sometime lord Lorne, ought not to be restored to the honour or estate of his late father Archibald sometime marquess of Argyle* (Wing S.4581A), 1661, 4.

⁶⁴ W. Ralston and John Cunningham to Argyll, 26 Nov. 1672, Campbells, Earls of Argyll, NLS, MS.975, fo. 13r; W. Ralston to Argyll, Papers of the Campbell Family, Dukes of Argyll, NRAS1209, bundle 125.

⁶⁵ NRS, CH2/111/1, fos 103v-104r.

⁶⁶ NRS, SC54/17/4/2/3.

⁶⁷ *Earls of Cromartie*, i, 11-4.

⁶⁸ Alexander Brodie, *The diary of Alexander Brodie of Brodie*, ed. D. Laing, Aberdeen 1863, 313.

⁶⁹ *RPCS*, x, 408, 412-3, 521.

⁷⁰ *Letters illustrative of public affairs in Scotland, addressed by contemporary statesmen to George, earl of Aberdeen*, ed. J. Dunn, Aberdeen 1851, 71-2.

⁷¹ James Fraser, *Memoirs of the Rev. James Fraser, of Brea, A.D.1639-1698*, Inverness 1889, 23-6, 237-8, 269-90.

⁷² *RPCS*, vi, 417, 431; *Inverness and Dingwall*, 345; Wodrow, *history of the sufferings*, ii, 3-4.

⁷³ *RPCS*, x, 421.

⁷⁴ Tarbat to Lauderdale, 18 Jan. 1679, Lauderdale correspondence 1657-98, EUL, La.III.354, fo. 75.

⁷⁵ *Inverness and Dingwall*, 338-9; *RPCS*, viii, 157-8.

⁷⁶ Hyman, 'Church militant', 53-4.

⁷⁷ Fraser, *Memoirs of the Rev. James Fraser*, 257.

⁷⁸ D.C. MacLean, 'Catholicism in the Highlands and isles 1560-1680', *Innes Review*, 3:1, 1952, 5-13, at p.7, pp.11-3.

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⁸⁴ Macinnes, *Clanship*, 93, 174.

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⁸⁷ John Cahassy to Everard, 2 Dec. 1683, Blair letters, SCA, BL/1/90/2; Macdonald, *Missions to the Gaels*, 172.

⁸⁸ Martin Martin, *A description of the western islands of Scotland circa 1695* ed. C.W.J. Withers, Edinburgh 2002, 29, 58, 60, 63, 69, 131, 142, 149, 152, 156, 165, 166, 167, 174.

⁸⁹ *Inverness and Dingwall*, 43, 48-9, 77; NRS, CH2/271/2, fo. 415, fos 432-7; James Nicoll to Aneas Macdonald, 13 September 1680, Blair letters, SCA, BL/1/63/20; George Gordon to Mr Whyteford, 26 Sep. 1687, Blair letters, SCA BL/1/101/11.

⁹⁰ *RPCS*, ii, 322-3; Macdonald, *Missions to the Gaels*, 174-6; Mr Rian to Angus Macdonnell, 23 June 1681, Blair letters, SCA, BL/1/72/9.

⁹¹ Robert Munro to Aeneas MacDonnell, 4 Feb. 1681, Blair letters, SCA, BL/1/72/6.

⁹² Roberts, 'Roman Catholicism', 77-81.